

JAPAN CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY NEWS

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In These Pages

Preparing for Christmas.....1	Muto Hails Lay Visitation
Kyodan Rural Evangelism.....2	Evangelism5
Atomic Energy and the Seikokai...3	Coming Events5
New Life Movement & the NCC4	

PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS -- Question: When is Christmas not a Christmas?

Because foreigners in Japan must shop early to meet the mailing deadline for packages to be sent back home, the elaborate Christmas displays in the large department stores get an early start in Japan. "Any excuse for a celebration" seems to be the motto of the Japanese in general and commercial enterprises in particular.

Thus to the question, "When is Christmas not a Christmas?" the answer is, "When it is only a hollow papier-maché Santa who is heartlessly exploited by gift shops". With no back-ground in Christianity but an avid interest in western customs, the Japanese have put "Jingle Bells", "White Christmas" and gaily wrapped presents on a shelf right beside the century old god-shelves. And in most cases both are equally devoid of any deeply vital meaning.

In an effort to put some meaning into the superficial form that is already so popular, Christian churches, Sunday Schools, kindergartens, bookstores, and universities will be working overtime during the coming month to tell the Good News of the Great Gift.

Various groups in the N.C.C. have been producing materials which will be useful in this task. The Home and Family Life Committee brought out a new booklet "How To Observe Christmas in the Home" which has sold out half of the original printing in the last month. This booklet (see JCAN 10/15/55 P.4) is aimed

particularly at those who have little background in the true meaning of Christmas. Also in preparation for this season, on November 20 a demonstration of various audio-visual materials for Christmas use was presented at the Christian Audio Visual Center and attended by over one hundred persons. "The Birth of the Holy Child" which is being produced jointly by the YWCA players and the Bungakuza players, will be performed on stage in Tokyo on December 14, 15 and broadcast over the Japan National Radion Network on December 24th.

In preparation for Christmas several Audio Visual Aids have been developed and added to the AVACO library: 1) Two films, "The Nativity Story" and the "Mouses' Christmas" have been magni-striped and appropriate narrative sound tracks have been added in Japanese. 2) Four filmstrips made in America with translated scripts have been added since last year. They are, "Peace Among Men on Earth", "The Three Wise Men", "The Other Wise Man" and "The Shepherd's Gift". 3) "Ugoku Kamishibai" (moving Kamishibai) have been developed. The famous story of "The Other Wise Man" has been done in the "Ugoku Kamishibai" in a large two by three foot size. The moving kamishibai is larger and much more complicated than the ordinary kamishibai. The story has been recorded in dramatic form with musical background on tape. Later it will also be produced in a 4 by 6 foot size.

4) Illuminated Kamishibai is the same size as an ordinary "picture story" but is made of colored cellophane and silhouettes. An ordinary light is shown from behind and the different colors and shapes give an unusually powerful dramatic effect. The nativity story and the Passion story have been done in illuminated kamishibai and the narratives have been recorded on tape with musical background. This kind of silhouette is also done on 2 x 2 slides and projected.

KYODAN RURAL EVANGELISM - long and short term projects

November was observed as Rural Evangelism Month by many churches in the Kyodan (United Church of Christ in Japan). The Kyodan Rural Evangelism Commission sent out a poster and a pamphlet to every church with suggestions on how to observe a Thanksgiving Service some Sunday in the Month. One suggestion was to bring samples of the crops harvested by the members of the church to be placed at the altar during the service. These products were then distributed to the needy in the community after the service.

During this month many pastors of rural churches exchanged pulpits with pastors of urban churches in an effort to bring a feeling of closeness and understanding between the two. A constantly recurring problem for rural churches is that many of the newly won members soon move away to the city. The causes of this are rooted deeply within the social system of rural Japan:

Because rural society is still for the most part a tightly organised feudalistic one, those who become Christians often feel estranged from their community and find it easier to move than to stay. Also, since there is so little land that it can no longer be subdivided, the rule of primogeniture is still largely followed in which the eldest son is expected to stay on to carry on the work and the traditions of the family. It is very difficult for such a person to become a Christian because of the family pressure on him. The second and third sons and daughters are more free and often are attracted to Christianity but are soon forced to move to the city to find employment.

Two conclusions follow from this situation: 1) It is very difficult to build up a self supporting church in rural Japan. It often takes as long as thirty years, or one generation. 2) Because churches in the city benefit by the hard evangelistic work done in the rural areas, it is natural and right that they in turn support the work of rural evangelism.

For the above outlined reasons, two meetings were held during November in which the help of leading laymen in the Tokyo area and the Osaka area was enlisted for rural evangelism. On November 20 about 50 leading laymen in the Tokyo area gathered in the official residence of Mr. Motojiro Sugiyama, Vice Speaker of the Lower House of the Diet. Many of these leaders were so impressed that they agreed to go themselves to teach in rural gospel schools which are held in many rural evangelistic stations during the relatively free winter months. Some of them offered to try to get special appropriations in their local church budgets to support the work of rural evangelism. On November 23 about 70 lay leaders gathered in the Shimanouchi Church in Osaka. This was an unusually representative group. Although the speakers did not mention the need for money, the laymen themselves began asking how they could help. If there was need for money, how much and where, was their attitude. The representatives of the Federation of Women's Societies were particularly enthusiastic in their offer of help. These two meetings bode well for the future of this preponderantly urban church.

Two other projects carried out largely during this month were: 1) Christian Rural Youth Conferences held in each of the 14 Kyodan districts. These Conferences discussed the same questions which were raised and discussed at the Annual National Rural Christian Youth Conference. 2) Several Rural Evangelistic Caravans composed of missionaries and students largely from urban areas were organized and used effectively in visiting and strengthening churches in rural areas. This was the first time that this method has been tried and the results were encouraging.

ATOMIC ENERGY AND THE SEIKOKAI - hopeful but indefinite

The recent visit in this country of Dr. William G. Pollard, world famed atomic scientist, has encouraged a flurry of newspaper

predictions and articles to the effect that St. Paul's University (Rikkyo, a university of the Japan Episcopal Church) is about to receive an atomic reactor from the Protestant Episcopal Church of the U.S.A.

The basis for this rumor seems to lie in the facts that the Washington Diocese last spring unanimously passed a recommendation to the General Convention that an atomic reactor be given to St. Paul's University. No specific recommendations as to the source of the estimated original cost of \$550,00 or the annual maintenance cost of \$250,000 was made. When the recommendation was brought before the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the USA meeting in Hawaii last summer, it was referred to a specially formed Commission for study in view of the immensity of the project and the many details involved in carrying it out.

This fall, Dr. Pollard who recently has become a priest in the Episcopal Church, and who is a member of the above Commission, came to this country and did visit St. Paul's University. However, he was sent here by the Atomic Energy Commission of the United States Government. According to reliable sources he knew of no specific plans whereby the projected gift to Rikkyo could be soon realized. However, in his incidental visit to the University, he was favorably impressed with the school and expressed the wish that such a project could be carried out if the requisit money and personnel could be found. The report of the Commission will be given to the next General Convention three years hence.

Thus newspaper reports that such a gift had been "decided upon" and even that the Episcopal Church planned to give several such reactors around East Asia are both premature and inaccurate.

NEW LIFE MOVEMENT AND THE NCC - tentative negotiations under way

On November 26 a few of the Christians who are leaders in the Japanese national government-sponsored "New Life Movement" (see JCAN 10/15/55) met with members of the NCC Home and Family Life Committee. Among these representing the Movement were Mr. Junzo Sasamori, Democratic Liberal Member of the Lower House of the Diet, and member of a former Methodist Church; and Mr. Takasumi Mitsui, representative in the Movement of Moral Re-Armament. Mr. Takeshi Muto, Moderator of the Kyodan was also there.

During the talks, Mr. Sasamori explained how the New Life Movement came into being and what its purpose and actual program is. The representatives of the Home and Family Life Committee explained the purpose of the Committee and expressed the desire to find ways that the two groups could cooperate together where their goals and methods are the same. The talks will be continued at a later date.

MUTO HAILS LAY VISITATION EVANGELISM - "truly a turning point"

Rev. Takeshi Muto, Moderator of the Kyodan (United Church of Christ in Japan) recently said, "Home mission work in Japan is at a turning point. Hitherto, Mission work has meant a great preaching meeting. This is a good way to make as many people as possible all at once understand what the Christian gospel means, and this method is also useful and necessary. However, our most important problem today is how to bring the large number of "inquirers" into continuous connection with the church...There is no other way to do it but to have Christians stick together...each one, engaging in mission work.For this reason, I believe that Homan Dendo (Volunteer lay visitation evangelism) is truly a turning point in the evangelizing of Japan."

This and other interesting news was contained in the first issue of "Volunteer Homan Dendo News", a news sheet recently started by the Kyodan Homan Dendo Committee. Those wishing to receive this news sheet free may write to this committee at Kyobunkwan, 7th floor, 2, 4-chome, Ginza, Tokyo.

COMING EVENTS

THE CHRISTIAN HYMN HOUR, daily 6:20 A.M. and 6:00 A.M. on Sundays, November 26th through Christmas day, five minutes on weekdays and ten minutes on Sunday. Featuring hymns by the KAY Chorus with interpretation by Christian Pastors, this program is jointly sponsored by the Kyobunkwan, a Christian publishing house, and Hymnbook Committee of the United Church of Christ in Japan. AVACO is doing the production of the program. Aired over Japan Broadcasting Company 1310 on your dial.

